

# Asthma and Depression

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The relationship of psychology to asthma dates back to research in the 1950's, which stated that children with asthma substitute wheezing for crying because they fear that crying would result in a loss of their mother's love. Obviously, we have come a long way in the diagnosis and treatment of asthma since the 1950's!

We now know that asthma is due to inflammation of the airways and constriction of the muscles around the airways. Pharmaceutical research has revolutionized the treatment of asthma: The main medical treatment for persistent asthma is controller medication, including products such as Advair, Flovent, Pulmicort, and Singulair. An issue that is still studied by psychologists and asthma researchers is the relationship between asthma and depression. Some research indicates that 50% of patients with asthma may have depression.

Depression is diagnosed when five or more of the following symptoms are present during a two-week period:

1. Depressed mood;
2. Markedly diminished interest in activities;
3. Significant weight loss or weight gain;
4. Insomnia (not able to sleep) or hypersomnia (sleeping too much);
5. Slowed reflexes;
6. Fatigue;
7. Feelings of worthlessness;
8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate;
9. Recurrent thoughts of death.

Depression has been linked to low levels of a neurotransmitter called serotonin. Medications such as Paxil, Prozac, and Zoloft work by increasing serotonin levels in the brain and help many individuals with depression. Counselors frequently use stress management programs, individual counseling, family counseling, and support groups to assist individuals in dealing with asthma. In stress management programs, individuals learn how to do deep breathing so that emotions do not trigger an asthma episode. In individual counseling and family counseling, individuals discuss how asthma affects their emotions, moods, and day-to-day activities. The counselor attempts to work with the individual to create a better life.

To help people understand the medical and emotional issues associated with asthma, the Rockford Asthma Consortium is forming an **education and support group** for adults with asthma and parents of children with asthma. We will meet the first and

third Thursdays of each month from 6:30-8:00 PM. We'll gather in conference room D of Swedish-American Hospital (near the cafeteria on the fourth floor).

*This is YOUR group: Come be part of providing what YOU need in terms of asthma education.*